ARTISTIC APPRECIATION OF THE ROCK ART OF CHATURBHUJNATH NALA

SYNOPSIS FOR PH.D.DISSERTATION IN DRAWING AND PAINTING
FROM DAYALBAGH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE
(DEEMED UNIVERSITY)AGRA

2014

Researcher

Arti Sharma
Drawing and Painting Department
Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra

Supervisor

Prof. Ashvini Kumar Sharma
Drawing and Painting Department
Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra

Co-Supervisor

Prof. Giriraj Kumar
Sanskrit Department
Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra

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Arti Sharma
Drawing and Painting Department
Faculty of Arts
D.E.I. (Deemed University)
Dayalbagh, Agra

Supervisor

Prof. Ashvini Kumar Sharma
Drawing and Painting Department
Faculty of Arts
D.E.I. (Deemed University)
Dayalbagh, Agra

Co-Supervisor

Prof. Giriraj Kumar
Faculty of Arts
D.E.I. (Deemed University)
Dayalbagh, Agra

Dean

Prof. Urmila Anand
Head of Sanskrit Department
Faculty of Arts
D.E.I. (Deemed University)
Dayalbagh, Agra

Head of Department

Prof. Ragini Roy
Head of Drawing and Painting
Faculty of Arts
D.E.I. (Deemed University)
Dayalbagh, Agra

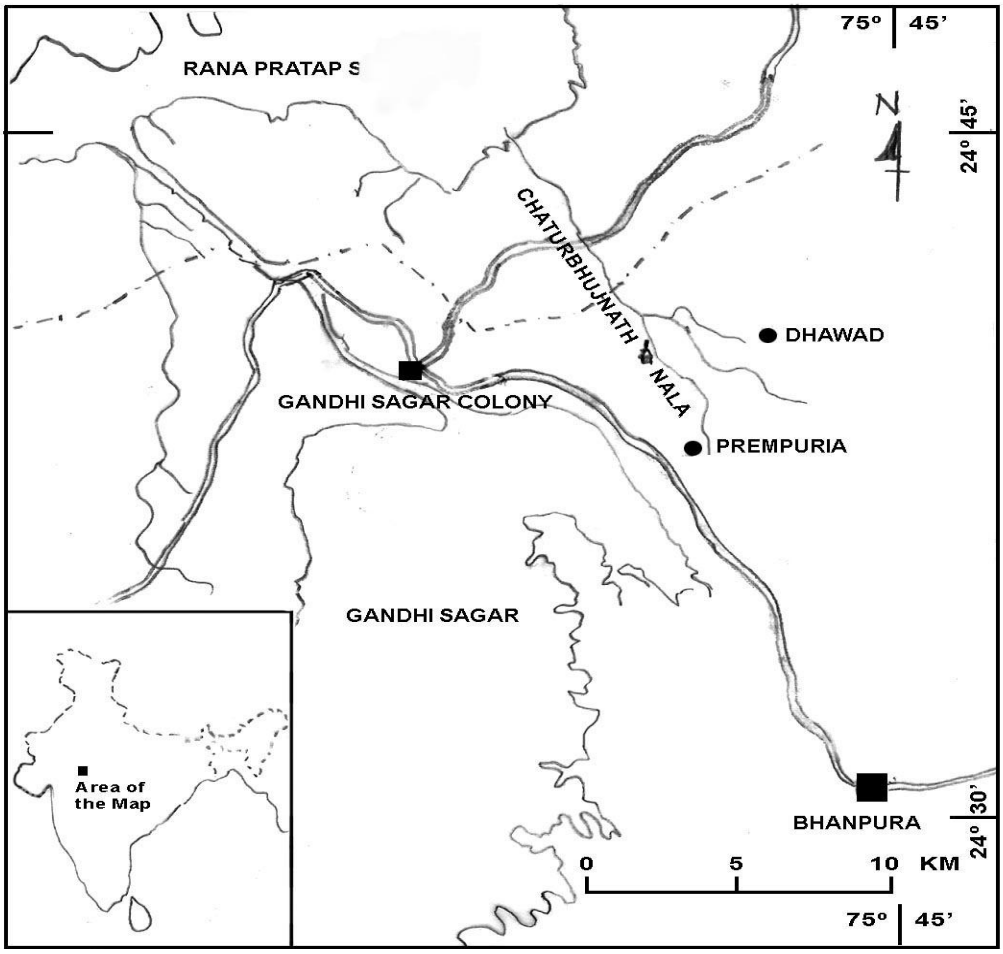

Fig. 1.Map of showing the position of Chaturbhujnath Nala rock art site (longest rock art gallery in the world).

ARTISTIC APPRECIATION OF THE ROCK ART OF CHATURBHUJNATH NALA

Conceptual frame

Rock art is a global phenomenon. It forms the archaic visual manifestations of hominines on rocks, which have survived the vagaries of time. Other archaic forms of human cultural activities such as dance, music, songs, thoughts, ideas, language, etc. could not survive. It means rock art is one of the many aspects of human creativity and cultural activities which has survived and available to us, hence it is a very important source for understanding the cognitive and cultural development of the hominines.

India is one of the three countries having the richest treasures of rock art in the world. Other two are Australia and Africa. In India, Madhya Pradesh is the richest state in rock art sites and Chaturbhujnath nala rock art site in it, is incredible.

Chaturbhujnath nala is the longest rock art gallery in the world. It is located in the Gandhisagar game sanctuary in Bhanpura region, in Mandasaur district of Madhya Pradesh. Here rock art has been executed in additive technique on bare surface of rock without any preparation of the surface, mostly using iron oxide pigments of different shades. The latter are available naturally in the form of small nodules. Sometimes white and black mineral colours have also been used.

The rock art of Chaturbhujnath nala is still in its pristine condition. It manifests human understanding of reality, the wild life and environment around him, the challenges and his spirit to overcome them, devices and inventions made, the rituals and culture developed and the philosophy evolved to live a peaceful happy life. Besides, the transition from hunting-foraging to pastoral life is distinct in the rock art of Chaturbhujnath Nala.

The rock paintings of Chaturbhujnath nala can be classified broadly in two groups:1. Depicting hunting-foraging life of Pre-cattle domesticating Mesolithic Stone Age, and 2. Depicting early pastoral life with evolutionary traits in it. Rock paintings of both the periods exhibit distinct features with stylistic, thematic and qualitative differences in their execution. It provides a valuable record of the human perception of reality and his cognitive and cultural development in Mesolithic Stone Age followed by early pastoral communities in Neolithic, Neolithic-Chalcolithic and Neolithic-Historic periods. Many paintings or compositions are as good as any other great work of rock art. Therefore, the rock paintings of Chaturbhujnath nala form a precious and outstanding archive of the visual creative traditions of prehistoric age.

Review of literature

Rock art of Bhanpura region has been studied by V.S.Wakankar(1973, 2005), Ramesh K. Pancholi, Tilner and his team, Giriraj Kumar (1983, 2002, Kumar et al 2002) and

Jean Clottes (2004). Kumar thoroughly documented the rock art of Chaturbhujnath nala (G.Kumar 2007) and brought out its analytical study (G.Kumar and A.Pradhan 2008). Besides, he also studied the continuity of the creative tradition in the people of the region (Kumar and Bhatt2008). I went through the available literature on rock art of Bhanpura region and also that of India (J.Gupt 1967, V.S.Wakankar 1973, 1978, 2005, 2008, V.S.Wakankar and Brooks 1976, Y. Mathpal 2005, K.K.Chakravarty and Robert G.Bednarik 2008). I am also going through a book on Rock Art Science by Bednarik (2007). I discussed the theme with Giriraj Kumar and visited the famous rock art site Bhimbetka and Jaora near Bhopal in the Vindhyas and ChatubhujnathNala and Chibbadnala in Chambal valley along with him in December 2013. The company of Yann Pierre Montelle, a rock art expert from New Zealand as the guest of Kumar and discussions with him during that trip provided me an opportunity of observing rock art from different perspective. The trip was a wonderful experience to look, feel and understand the rock art in its natural ambience on the spot.

Hypothesis

1. Primary concern for artistic appreciation of rock art

From the study of the available literature I realised that the rich Indian rock art heritage was neglected in general by the contemporary artists. Even the scholars working on rock art did not give proper attention to the artistic appreciation of rock art. The veteran scholars like Jagdish Gupt, V.S. Wakankar and Y. Mathpal being artist themselves touched the subject, but secondarily. The artistic appreciation of rock art was not their prime concern. Probably it was the time when scholars were heavily concerned to deal with the antiquity of Indian rock art and to provide it a proper place in the world, especially in the perspective of European cave art.

Now the time has come to change this attitude. Therefore, being the student of visual art, I decided to take this challenge and carry out research on artistic appreciation of the rock art of Chaturbhujnath nala, the longest rock art gallery in the world, for my Ph.D. dissertation.

2. Parameters for appreciation of rock art

Because of the nature of rock art we cannot do proper justice by applying the six limbs of paintings for its appreciation. Therefore, different parameters were needed for it. Kumar did an effort in this direction (2013). I'll make these parameters the basis for my research. If needed, I'll modify them.

3. General spirit behind the creation of rock art

No one can understand the exact meaning of rock art unless the artist himself/herself comes and explains it. It is also true in the case of contemporary art. Hence, instead of imposing the meaning, I'll be concerned more about the artistic quality of the rock art and will try to understand the general spirit behind it as a whole.

4. **Understanding the roots of the mature visual artistic traditions in India**

We have a rich tradition of classical visual art in the form of cave paintings at Ajanta, Ellora, Pitalkhora, Bagh, etc in early historic period. Prior to it Indus-Saraswati valley cultures have yielded wonderful artistic objects. But question arises that where is the beginning of these mature artistic traditions. The rich and varied Stone Age rock art heritage of ours can provide answer to this serious question. The beginning has to be made somewhere. My research work will be a humble effort in this direction.

Aims and objectives

1. The main aim of my research is to bring out the artistic wealth of the rock art of Chaturbhujnath Nala.
2. Humans, animals and their activities form the major constituent of the rock art treasure of Chaturbhujnath nala. They have been depicted in different forms and styles. I'll study the varied forms, styles and ways of their decoration and presentation.
3. I will also try to understand the impact of the use of space as boundary-less canvas so profusely used by the artists in all the periods, and will try to apply it in modern art compositions, if possible.
4. I'll try to understand the general spirit behind the artistic creations in Chaturbhujnath Nala.
5. To understand and feel rock art compositions with phenomenological approach and recreate them on canvas in my own way.
6. I'll try to understand the impression of rock art on contemporary art as attempted by Nirdip Roy (1991).

Variables

(a) Seasons and Climate

(b) Facilities available

(c) Natural resources: Water and Light

(d) Team

(e) Study methods if any depending on the experience on the site

Methodology

(a) Research design:-The design of the study is exploration, documentation, survey and study of the rock art site, and also the tribal and pastoral communities living in the area.

(b) Tools:- Camera, compass, measuring tap, magnifying glass, survey kit, first aid, satellite map, drawing and painting kit, internet, Interviews of the local persons and scholars, field notes etc.

(i)Primary:- Photography, Copying of rock art, sketching and painting, observation on the spot of the rock art and Rock art site.

(ii)Secondary:-Journals, articles, books, catalogues, site forms, field notes, maps, photographs and website etc.

(c) Sample size

I will select100 to 150 or as much as possible rock art compositions of Chaturbhujnath nala for presentation and study.

(d) Interview

(i) Local people

(ii) Rock art experts

(iii) Scholars working on rock art and contemporary art

(e) Procedure of data collection

(i) Copying the rock art

(ii) Photography

(iii) Sketching and painting

(iv) Recording the information and facts

(f) Limitations

Early rock art may not be visibly very good, so we have to support them with eye copies.

Rock art is not so good to see in dry season so we have to go especially in rainy season when there is sufficient humidity in the air.

Rock art has to be understood in the total perspective of the site and the region. No one can understand the exact meaning of the rock art compositions unless the artist himself (herself) comes and explains.

Findings

Observation, documentation and analytical study of data will be the main source for the findings of my research work.

Application of study in the present scenario

An artist has to develop her (his) own identity in terms of style, technique, choice of colours, etc. For this purpose s/he has to study the available art traditions. Rock art of Chaturbhujnath Nala is very rich in forms, styles, creativity and presentation of life and nature as realised by the artist. So my research work will be a humble attempt to bring out this ancient rich treasure to the field of the discipline of visual art for the first time. The contemporary artist may use it in whatever the way they like.

Date: Research Scholar

Arti Sharma

ARTISTIC APPRECIATION OF THE ROCK ART OF CHATURBHUJNATH NALA

Content

Introduction

- Rock art: a global phenomenon
- Distribution of rock art sites in India
- Geology and geomorphology of the Bhanpura-Gandhisagar plateau
- Rock art and archaeological traditions of the region
- Antiquity of the rock art in India
- Significance of rock art in the contemporary visual art

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6.2. Silhouetted (completely filled in) forms: Natural, geometrical, abstract (schematic) forms.
6.3. Decorative forms: Natural, geometrical, abstract (schematic) forms.
6.4. Partially filled in forms: Natural, geometrical, abstract (schematic) forms.
6.5. Combination of partially filled in and decorative forms.
6.6. Quality of lines, colours and strokes.
6.7. Combination of the above two or more of the above.

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Chapter 10: Visual presentation of the impression of the site and rock art in it

I'll try to bring out the ambience and intangible aspect of the life of the artists of rock art of different periods at the site through paintings and drawings as I will understand.

Conclusion

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List of figures

Arti Sharma

Research Scholar
Dayalbagh Educational Institute
Agra

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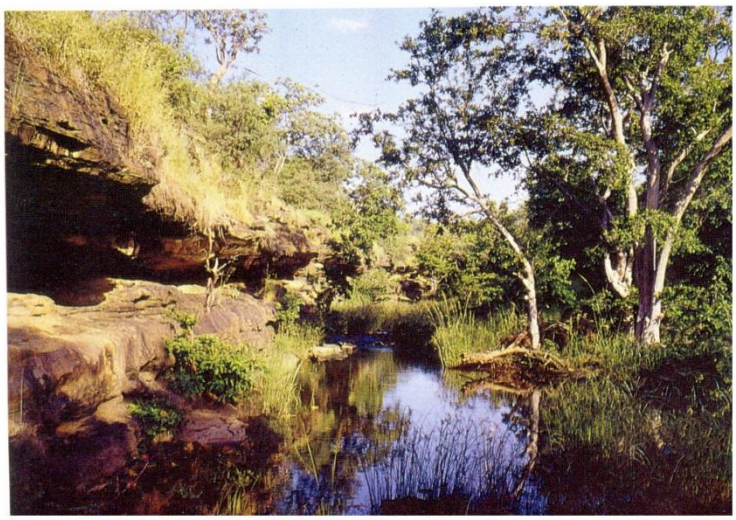

Fig. 1. Chaturbhujnath nala rock art galleries.

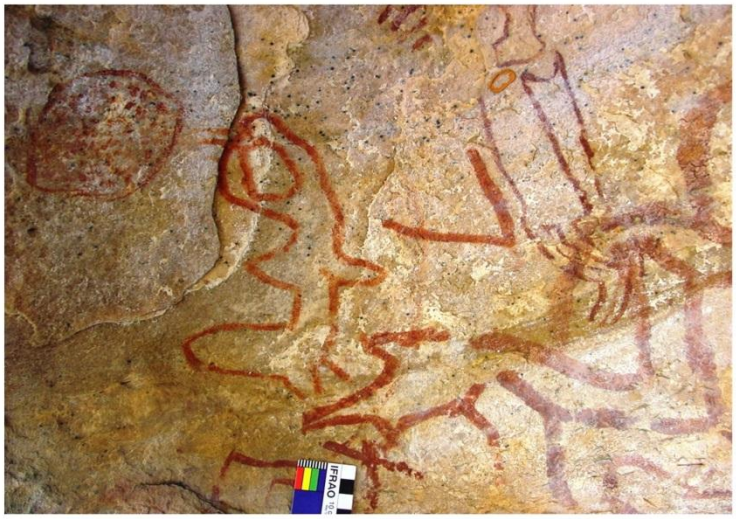

Fig. 2. A figure of dancing lady depicted in abstract form with prominent breast and hips. Mesolithic period. Chaturbhujnath nala.

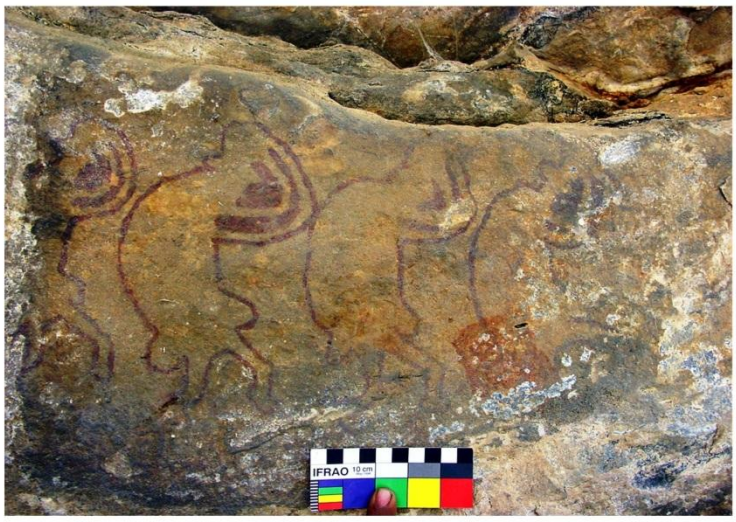

Fig. 3. Load bearers. Mesolithic period. Chaturbhujnath nala.

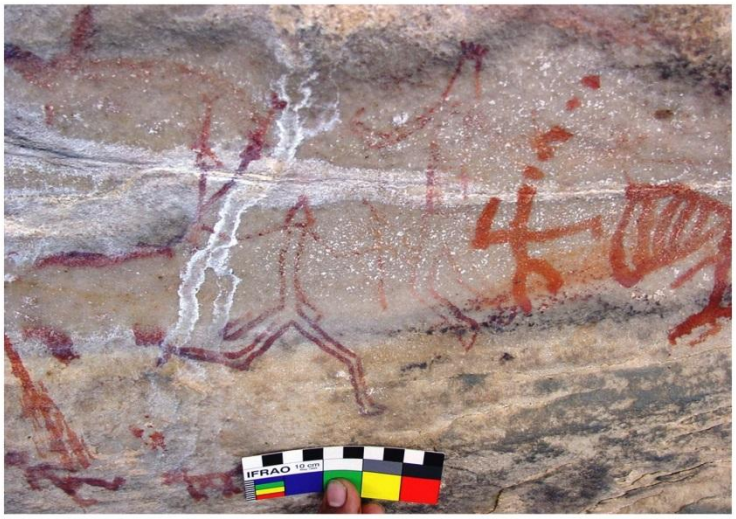

Fig. 4. Dynamic archer (may be a dance of martial art), in the right side a depiction of chari dance. Mesolithic period. Chaturbhujnath nala.

Fig. 5. Early animal in outlines super imposed by a group of dancers , executed in dotes. Late pastoral period. Chaturbhujnath nala.

Fig. 6. Humped bulls decorated in segment style. Neolithic-chalcolithic period. Chaturbhujnath nala.

Fig.7. Stylistic old human figure with a stick in minimum lines. Late pastoral. Chaturbhujnath nala.

Fig. 8. Study of rock art.

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